

Flood water can contain raw sewage, other harmful contaminants

(Boston, Mass. – March 29, 2010) – EPA cautions the public and emergency responders about the potential hazards associated with flood waters. Flood waters can contain unhealthy substances, including raw sewage and other hazardous substances. Every effort should be made to limit contact with flood water due to potentially elevated levels of contaminants.

During heavy rains, sanitary sewers may overflow into floodwaters. Avoid contact with floodwater due to potential contamination with raw sewage and other hazardous substances. Avoid swimming and boating in floodwaters and do not allow children or pets to wade or play in floodwaters.

EPA offers the following guidelines for those in contact with flood water:

- Wash your hands before drinking and eating;
- Wash frequently using soap -- especially disinfecting soap;
- Do not smoke;
- Limit direct contact with contaminated flood water;
- Pay attention to any cuts or open wounds and limit exposure to flood water;
- Pay attention to any unusual symptoms and report them to health care professionals;
- Keep vaccinations current.

The public and emergency response personnel should follow guidelines from federal, state and local health and safety professionals. Early symptoms from exposure to contaminated flood water may include upset stomach, intestinal problems, headache and other flu-like discomfort. Anyone experiencing these and any other problems should immediately seek medical attention.

General precautions to reduce contact with contaminated flood include routine washing with soap, and not eating or drinking while in contact with flood water. These precautions can significantly help reduce potential exposure and illness. Anyone with open-wounds or pre-existing conditions should seek immediate consultation to prevent possible illness.

Notify response officials immediately if you are aware of oil spills or other potential contamination of flood waters by chemicals - call 1-800-424-8802.

EPA has compiled other useful information on the web to assist individuals and municipalities address post-flooding clean up concerns. Issues include mold, septic systems, municipal water treatment plants, drinking water and food.

More information:

- EPA's website on floodwater: <http://www.epa.gov/region1/topics/water/flooding.html>
 - Sanitation and Hygiene After a Flood (Information from the Centers for Disease Control: (<http://www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters/floods/sanitation.asp>
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The New England states affected by the flooding also have a great deal of useful information for both residents and responders.

Connecticut

Connecticut Dept. of Emergency Management & Homeland Security <http://www.ct.gov/demhs/>

Maine

Maine Emergency Management Agency: <http://www.maine.gov/mema/>

Maine information on wells inundated by flooding: <http://www.maine.gov/dhhs/eng/water/Templates/FloodEmergency.htm>

Massachusetts

Mass. Emergency Management Agency: <http://bit.ly/d6rRCx>

Governor Patrick's Flood Safety Tips <http://www.mass.gov/>

New Hampshire

Flood Hotline: 1-800-458-2407

N.H. Dept. of Environmental Services – Flood information: <http://des.nh.gov/organization/commissioner/pip/storm/index.htm>

N.H. info what to do after a flood: <http://www.nh.gov/safety/divisions/emergservices/documents/AfteraFlood.pdf>

Rhode Island

- R.I. Emergency Management Agency: <http://www.riema.ri.gov/>

Vermont

- Vermont Emergency Management: <http://www.dps.state.vt.us/vem/>

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